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Composer Shostakovich dies after life of praise, censure

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

MOSCOW — (UPI-AP) — Composer Dmitri Shostakovich, whose fortunes and music rose and fell with the whims of Soviet power, died Saturday of a heart attack at the age of 68, his family announced yesterday.

Shostakovich, who composed hundreds of works for symphony, piano, violin, opera, ballet and film, had suffered periodic ailments for the last nine years.

He died of a heart attack Saturday night, a relative reported. She said the composer was admitted Aug. 1 to the heart section of Moscow's Kuntsevo Hospital, where he died.

While he was universally regarded as a gifted, prolific and often courageous composer, many Western critics and Soviet contemporaries felt his creativity had been stifled by years of having to tread Soviet ideological eddies.

Toward the end of his life, this once-daring innovator railed against avant-garde experimentation and "vanguardism" in Soviet music.

Shostakovich was considered a master of polyphony, following a course charted by Russian experimentalists like Glazunov and Taneyev. Despite what critics considered to be relapses into unimaginative formula, his early works influenced a generation of modern composers here and abroad.

Shostakovich, who took up the piano at the age of nine, wrote his first work at 11 and his first symphony at 19.

His 1928 opera Lody Macbeth of Mtensk enjoyed enormous success for two years until Josef Stalin saw it and Pravda killed it by calling it "crude, primitive and vulgar." The revised version, Katerina Ismailova, has been restored to the Bolshoi theatre repertory.

Shostakovich redeemed himself by writing his single Fifth Symphony which became known as "The Symphony of Socialism."

He stirred patriotic feelings with his 1942 Seventh Symphony dedicated to his native Leningrad. A fire fighter in that city, Shostakovich wrote it while German shells were falling around him.

After Stalin's death in 1953, Shostakovich published another internationally acclaimed work, his 10th Symphony, then fell into disfavor again with his 13th Symphony, based on a poem by Yevgeny Yevtushenko about the slaughter of the Jews at Babi Yar.

J. Geils Band near blues heights, but Offenbach plumbs the depths

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

The best and worst of white blues was demonstrated last night in concert at Place des Nations. The J. Geils Band has lent respectability to white musicians taking off from the archtypical forms of the rhythm 'n' blues greats. The Rolling Stones started off this way in the mid-1960s, but during the current decade it's the Geils sextet that has attained dominence in the genre.

The other end of the scale, however, came first — in the droning presence of Offenbach, a local group. This quartet once recorded a rock tribute at St. Joseph's Oratory, then spent 18 months in France working on their forthcoming movie, entitled Tabernac.

Now they're back to inflict an even more turgid outpouring of blues based heavy rock. Actually, about the only similarity to the blues is found in their basics, which are still obliterated by overkill.

One suspects that deficiencies in musicianship is the case here, although if they play loud enough their fans probably won't notice. Some fans even like the monotony of their solos, and the simple-minded approach to rhythm. If so, good luck, but this is heavy rock fodder at its most dirge-like.

FIRST SHOW

Those who have seen the J. Geils Band before mentioned that last night's performance was not quite as sharp as usual, and their manager said that the show was their first after vacations and recording sessions. However, even a slightly sluggish J. Geils Band offers a fascinating approach to high powered rhythm 'n' blues.

The group is led by a positively frenetic singer by the name of Peter Wolf, who comes on in a beret, sunglasses, and a studded black suit. A former disc jockey from Boston, and still a collector of vintage rhythm 'n' blues discs, Wolf has his gruff-voiced jive talking and singing down pat.

He bellars and yelps and huffs and puffs and races about the stage until he runs himself into exhaustion (naturally, part of the act is picking yourself up when there's no place else to go). Wolf is a charged, colorful spirit and there's a genuine spark and spontaneity to his schtick that places him leaps and bounds beyond most other rockers.

The instrumentalists each carry a large load: above all, this is a band that loves to play hard and flex great chunks of style.

J. Geils is the guitarist, the master of the tough sculpted phrase. Whether he's playing nitty, tight rhythm lines or economical blasts of soloing, he stands out and struts. So does harmonica ace Magic Dick, who makes his instrument sound like a saxophone. He seems to approach his music in the tradition of King Curtis, making his forays so much more absorbing than the legion of white harmonica players who seek only to show how technically good they are.

There was a lot of bottom to the bass and drums, respectively supplied by Danny Klein and Steve de Biasio, while organist-pianist Seth Justman offered bravado in his rumbles.

AP wirephoto

A Minnelli sample

Liza Minnelli signs autographs as she holds a piece of needlepoint presented by a fan in New York this weekend. She has taken over one of the lead roles in the musical Chicago from Gwen Verdon, who underwent throat surgery to remove pieces of confetti she swallowed while performing in the show.

Rock awards show honors Elton John

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — (UPI-AP) — Singer Elton John, shimmering in a gold tuxedo, was named outstanding rock personality of the year at the First Annual Rock Music Award presentation Saturday night.

Winners of awards received gold medallions, called Rockys.

The nationally-televised award program, which featured 24 music categories, honored Joni Mitchell as the best female vocalist and Stevie Wonder as the best male vocalist.

The Eagles were named the best rock group and Bad Company was honored as the best new rock group.

You're No Good, a song by Linda Ronstadt, was named the best single recording, while Bob Dylan's Blood on the Tracks was named the best album.

Dan Fogelberg was voted the best new male vocalist and Phoebe Snow took the honors in the female category.

Valiquette's friendly manner, strong guitar work appealing

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

To help celebrate the tenth anniversary of Laval, there's been a mini Quebecois pop festival at the Centre de la Nature Park over the past ten days.

Dozens of familiar names on the provincial music scene have appeared, representing various styles, and attracting thousands. The free concerts were held on what organizers hail as the largest permanent outdoor stage in Quebec (80 ft. by 40 ft.), and on Saturday night the rock element held sway, sounding out on a 10,000 watt speaker system.

The headliner was Gilles Valiquette, who at 24 is perhaps the brightest young star of the province. Having previously been a guitarist for Jacques Michel and Les Seguin, he branched out on his own over two years ago and has developed a large cult-like status amongst the young Quebecois rock generation.

He is a performer of unassuming proportions, seeking to identify with the basic feelings of his audience — something he does with great charm and sensitivity. He's a low-key singer, mellow, relaxed and thoughtful.

It is Valiquette's friendly nature that makes him so appealing, as well as his excellent guitar playing (acoustic and electric). He has a firm enough grasp of the basics to make his flourishes stand on their own.

One consistently feels that Valiquette could say more than he does, both lyrically and musically, but he has steadily explored possibilities at his own docile pace. It should be interesting to follow his progress with new shows this winter.

Also appearing was Contraction, a complex and intensely musical group who have had difficulty performing in the past, large in due to infrequent concerts. Led by singer Christiane Robichaud and bassist Yves Laferriere, both cerebral musicians who are rarely at a loss for ideas, this is a group that desperately needs the stability found in the rigors of constant shows. Their music is elegant and strong — once it settles down.

Singers Priscilla (sort of a Quebecois version of Olivia Newton-John) and Francois Guy (a light friendly personality) rounded out the show.

Cowboy stars won't die while we need 'release'

By ELIZABETH HARRIS
of UPI

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Old cowboy stars never die — they live forever preserved in celluloid and passed on from generation after generation on video-tape fans.

Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Red Ryder and Buster Crabbe were a few of the stars that captivated the kids for 50 cents on many a Saturday afternoon in the 1930s and 1940s.

Collectors value the B-westerns (B stands for budget). Nostalgia buffs flock to film festivals around the country to buy and swap movies, comic books and memorabilia.

A recent gathering in Nashville drew fans from all over the country who saw more than 200 films and visited with the men and women who made them.

Buster Crabbe, Jim (Red Ryder) Bannon, Ray (Crash) Corrigan, Eddie Dean, Harry Lauter, Al Hoxie, Peggy Stewart and Bob Russell were among the dozen former matinee idols who attended the festival.

Wearing turquoise Indian jewelry, hand-tooled boots and 10-gallon hats, the stars were happy to explain the renewed interest in their films.

RELEASE

Al Hoxie, one of the few living stars of the silent screen cowboy era, said he has been out of films for 50 years, but since 1968 he has received more fan mail than at any other time.

Why?

"Because cowboy picture are pure, clean and honorable," Hoxie said. "And as Duncan Renaldo (better known as the Cisco Kid) put it: They remind people of a time when America was a happy country. And we're not so happy these days."

Harry Lauter, a veteran of more than 500 cowboy films, is not known by name but his face is immediately recognizable. Lauter played Clay Morgan in The Texas Rangers and still works in television.

Audiences, he said, have had it with realism.

"We all have problems and we need some release. Cowboy and action pictures offer that. As a friend of mine said — 'I'm a working stiff and when I go to the movies I don't want to see a story about a guy whose wife has psychiatric problems. My wife has psychiatric problems'."

Buster Crabbe admitted to keeping up and enjoying the new films.

"You've got to see what the changes and the new trends are," said Crabbe, the former U.S. Olympic swimming champ who enthralled audiences as Flash Gordon, Tarzan, Billy the Kid and Buck Rogers.

USED BOTH

He predicted that viewers, glutted by flesheats and violence, will turn back to the action - packed films of the glamorous Hollywood heyday.

Several stars complained that today's cinema heroes spend too much time emoting and not enough time on a horse. Many of the old-timers worked on ranches, in circuses and rodeos or were excellent athletes before they went into films.

"I had two expressions, constipation and relief, and I used 'em both," said Bob Russell, a former New York Giants football pro, who had a brief film career in the '30s before returning to ranching.

"I knew how to get on and off of a horse without anticipation and that was enough to make me a star."

But there were problems with fans intent on testing the cowboys mettle off-screen, as they'll do with boxing champions.

"Some little guy was always walking up to you, poking a finger in your chest and saying 'Are you really as tough as you are in the movies?'," Barnon recalled.

"I usually laughed it off by answering, 'Well, I don't know myself until page 33 of the script if I'm going to win or lose.'"

Lauter said fans may have to be content with watching the old films. Money is the biggest reason studios don't make the old-style westerns despite their appeal.

"One 'Death Valley Days' show would cost about $9,000. It would run 10 times that much now. To give you an idea, we filmed a picture in Mexico several years ago and it cost the same for 40 natives to chase me up a pyramid as it would have to hire four extras to do the same thing on a Hollywood set."

Previn makes media music

ANDRE PREVIN
...interview 'conducted'

PITTSBURGH — (UPI) — Andre Previn conducts press conferences with the same skill and aplomb he leads the London Symphony.

The German-born musician and composer, who takes over as musical director of the Pittsburgh Symphony in September 1976, orchestrated his first meeting for the Pittsburgh media recently — piano, allegro, andante and fortissimo.

Like his fellow countryman, Henry Kissinger, the 46-year-old Previn answers questions glibly.

"Do you find composing popular music as difficult as writing classical music?"

DREADFUL

"No, not nearly as much." (Piano)

"You have a universal taste in music, Mr. Previn. Is there any form you don't care for?"

"Hawaiian music is dreadful. it turns me off." (Fortissimo)

"You are described as a devotee of 20th century music. But it has been reported you are a Mozart disciple."

"I think it would be difficult to find among colleagues a person who is not a Mozart disciple." (Andante).

Previn was asked to specify his choice in contemporary music.

"I plead ignorance to the electronic graph score," — the visual description of mechanically produced sound — he said. "It is my own fose, but if the explanation of how to read it is longer than the piece itself, I have to put it down."

He admitted a preference for the English composers Ralph Vaughan-Williams and William Walton, a somewhat unfashionable taste.

The 46-year-old Previn still succeed Dr. William Steinberg, 76, who has conducted the Pittsburgh Symphony for 23 years with a hypnotic economy of movement on the podium.

Previn was asked what changes he plans here.

"I would be phenomenally conceited to talk about changes so soon," he said. "I have had such a rare instance of fusion with this orchestra that it wouldn't be right to try to change it so soon."

Previn has toured the United States five times with the London Symphony, which he also took on a successful tour of Russia and East Asia.

He will continue his association with the London orchestra during his tenure in Pittsburgh. He will conduct the Pittsburgh Symphony for 12 weeks the first season and 14 weeks each in the second and third years of his contract.

FILM LIFE

Previn went to California with his family when he was 18. He spent several years writing music for motion pictures and conducted the Houston Symphony for two years.

Previn, his wife, actress Mia Farrow, and their family live in an 18th century farmhouse in Surrey, 40 miles from London. They are parents of four children, twin sons, Matthew and Sascha, who are 5, Lark, 2, a Vietnamese girl they adopted, and a boy, 11 months.

Previn was asked at what age children should be exposed to good music.

"My children were exposed to good music when my wife was pregnant," he said. (Allegro).

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